Chattampi Swamikal, Kannammoola, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

His parents

His father was Thamarassery Anadha Sharma, a Nambudiri Brahmin from Mavelikkara, and his mother was Nangamma, an Illathu Nair from Kannammoola.

Birth (location and year)

Born on 25 August 1853 at Kannammoola in southern Travancore (present-day Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, India).

Childhood

As his parents were unable to provide formal education, he learned letters and words from neighborhood children attending school.
He picked up Sanskrit by overhearing classes at a nearby Brahmin house.
An uncle, recognizing his thirst for learning, enrolled him in a traditional school run by Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan, a renowned scholar who taught him without fees.
There, he earned the nickname Chattampi for serving as class monitor.
He was affectionately called Kunjan Pillai.

Education

He self-taught Sanskrit by eavesdropping on nearby classes. He attended Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan's school tuition-free.
In the 1870s, he joined the scholarly group 'Jñānaprajāgaram,' learning Tamil from Swaminatha Desikar and philosophy from Professor Manonmaniyam Sundaram Pillai.

He spent years under Subba Jatapadikal from Kalladaikurichin, mastering all sastras in Tamil and Sanskrit, including Siddha medicine, music, and martial arts.

He was influenced by Kodakanallur Sundara Swamikal's works.

He studied Christian religion and philosophy under a Christian priest in southern Tamil Nadu and learned about the Qur'an and Sufi mysticism from an elderly Muslim.

Spiritual inclination

He denounced orthodox interpretations of Hindu texts using Vedic sources, worked to reform ritualistic and caste-ridden Hindu society, promoted vegetarianism and non-violence (Ahimsa), and believed all religions lead to the same ultimate truth.

He lived a wandering life like an avadhuta. He was initiated into spirituality by a wandering sadhu who gave him the Balasubramanya Mantra, which he mastered, adopting the name Shanmukhadasa due to his devotion to Subramanya.

He was introduced to yoga by Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal.

His guru

His gurus included Pettayil Raman Pillai Asan (early education), Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal (yoga introduction), Subba Jatapadikal (sastras, medicine, music, martial arts), a wandering sadhu (Balasubramanya Mantra initiation), a Christian priest (Christian teachings), an elderly Muslim (Islamic and Sufi knowledge), and an avadhuta at Vadaveeswaram (leading to self-realization).

Sadhana

He mastered the Balasubramanya Mantra for spiritual vigor.

He practiced yoga as taught by Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal.

He lived in isolation with an avadhuta in the forests at Vadaveeswaram, realizing God through the scientific art of the Siddhas.

Travels

He took up manual labor but soon left to wander in search of spiritual knowledge.

He traveled extensively across India, spending long periods with avadhutas in southern Tamil Nadu.

He wandered with friends from various Kerala regions while authoring books.

Realisation

Guided by an avadhuta at Vadaveeswaram, he lived in forest isolation, achieving self-realization.

He viewed the core concepts of all religions as identical and returned to Kerala as a revered scholar and saint.

Ashram (if any)

Towards the end of his life, he settled at Panmana, a village in Kollam district. No other ashrams are mentioned.

His works - main teachings, literary, religious, spiritual, social, educational..etc

Main teachings: He challenged orthodox Hindu views, reformed caste systems, emancipated women, advocated vegetarianism and ahimsa, and saw religions as paths to the same goal.

Literary: Authored books on spirituality, history, and language, including stanzas, essays, critiques, translations, and commentaries.

Notable: Pracheena Malayalam (historical study linking Kerala's groups to ancient roots).

Religious: Focused on Advaita philosophy; summarized and critiqued Christianity (e.g., Christhumatha Saram, Nirupanam); studied Islam through Qur'an and Sufism.

Spiritual: Works like Advaita Chinta Paddhati (practical Advaita guide), Nijananda Vilasam (Vedanta translation), and promotions of yoga.

Social: Reformed rituals, supported women's rights and equal status, fought caste injustices.

Educational: Created accessible Vedanta guides for non-Sanskrit speakers; participated in scholarly groups.

Other works include Vedadikara Nirupanam, Jivakarunya Nirupanam, Moksha Pradipa Khandanam, Prapanchathil Stri Purushanmarkkulla Sthanam, and more.

Routines in his Ashram

No specific daily routines are detailed for the Panmana settlement.

His main disciples

Key disciples included Narayana Guru, Neelakanta Theerthapada (Sanskrit scholar who reformed rituals), Theerthapada Paramahamsa (anti-caste advocate who established ashrams), Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Abedananda, and grihastha followers like Bodheswaran, Perunnelli Krishnan Vaidhyan, Velutheri Kesavan Vaidhyan, and Kumbalath Sanku Pillai.

His final days

He settled at Panmana in his later years. After a brief illness, he attained mahasamadhi on 5 May 1924 at age 70, refusing medicine.

Samadhi

He attained mahasamadhi on 5 May 1924 at Panmana and was buried there per Hindu saint traditions.

Monuments if any

A temple dedicated to Lord Shiva stands above his grave at Panmana.

The Government of India released a commemorative stamp on 30 April 2014 for his 90th death anniversary.

Any successor

No direct successor is noted, but disciples like Theerthapada Paramahamsa continued his teachings by establishing systems for sanyasins.

Any other info

He led a nomadic life, staying with friends across Kerala while writing.

Many works were recovered and published posthumously; the Centre for South Indian Studies hosts the Chattampi Swami Digital Archive.

Honored as Sree Vidyadhiraja Parama Bhattaraka Shanmughadasan.

Other names: Ayyappan Pillai, Kunjan Pillai, Shanmukhadasan.

His influence shaped Kerala's social, religious, literary, and political movements, empowering the marginalized.

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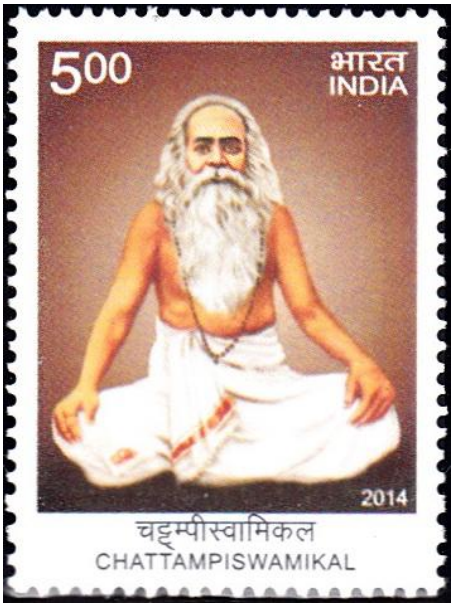
Photos



Samadhi of Chattampi Swamikal

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Videos

Chattampi Swamikal (0.52 min):

https://youtu.be/FyoXH9-yhqQ?si=cr8rYi5EkTLtnH7c

Chattampi Swamikal (2.48 min):

https://youtu.be/l2KLg9ui9kQ?si=dYtT9QRU_RS74EH7

Top 10 suites of Chattampi Swamikal (1.25 min):

https://youtu.be/yhzo_OBjGVM?si=DZfH5ZzyQtV3EnxZ

Chattampi Swamikal (3.4 min);

https://youtu.be/61SQcbhWyrs?si=6WHis3RAmN4yjrRr

Chattampi Swamikal (14 min):

https://youtu.be/3VcUbEoxFbs?si=WlE0yJ0JWa3aQj4w

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Dr. M. Thirumaleshwar
January 3, 2026
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